

CHAPTER IV

AND TRAVEL

1821-1824

At seventeen, Disraeli tells us, a great change took place in his life. In November, 1821, he was articled to a firm of solicitors in the City — Messrs. Swain, Stevens, Maples, Pearse, and Hunt, of Frederick's Place, Old Jewry.

My father had a great friend, the head of the most eminent solicitors' firm in the City, except Freshfield's, of whom they were the honored rivals. He was very rich (the firm of five partners divided, though in unequal portions, fifteen thousand per annum), a man of considerable taste, with a fine library and collections of art, and one daughter, by no means without charm, either personally or intellectually. This gentleman wished that I should enter into his profession, and, in due course, his firm, and the parents wished and meant something else, also in due course. . . . My father was very warm about this business: the only time in his life in which he exerted authority, always, however, exerted with affection. I had some scruples, for even then I dreamed of Parliament. My father's refrain always was Philip Carteret Webb, who was the most eminent solicitor of his boyhood and who was an M.P.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the two years and more that I was in the office of our friend were wasted. I have often thought, though I have often regretted the University, that it was much the reverse. My business was to be the private secretary of the busiest partner of our friend. He dictated to me every day his correspondence, which was as extensive as a Minister's, and when the clients arrived I did not leave the room, but remained not only to learn my business but to become acquainted with my future clients. They were in general men of great importance — bank directors, East India directors, merchants, bankers. Often extra-